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Comparative Study of emotional value perception, Communication and political support in online environment

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Abstract

This article explains how voter's emotional value perception of politicians affects their rational value perception and also trust in their policies, expectations for online communications and continuing political support. A research model connecting these factors is proposed with the cognitive path analysis determined by using structural equation model verification. The model verified that emotional value perception affects continuing political support. Furthermore, the emotional and rational perception of politicians by conservative voters is compared with progressive voters. For conservative voters, emotional perception has a strong influence on their rational perception and their trust in policies. For the progressive voter, communication expectation is a more important factor in garnering ongoing political support but the relationship is not statistically meaningful.

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Keywords : Policy trust; value perception; communication; online platform for political communication

1. Introduction

Presidential elections in South Korea are emotionally charged contests where regional conflicts flare up due to differences in political tendencies. Heated emotional debates and biases leave very little room for rational debates about the character of the candidates or their policies. The last election was vigorously fought and won by the conservative candidate Park Geun-hye, with only a slim 3.5% margin over the progressive candidate Moon Jae In. This raises the question, just how crucial emotional perceptions are in garnering political support

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in online environment. In this paper we aim to verify voters' rational or emotional value perceptions of politicians. We also look at people's political choices and ongoing support according to their political persuasion. And from these variables, we suggest an integrated research model which describes how voters come to choose their politicians. The moderating variable in our model is the political persuasion - conservative or progressive – of the voter. There are a plethora of political communication studies but our research provides some new insights into the field. A lot of our data was gathered using social media where we measured expectations for communication and the other variables in our model. With the emergence of the internet and social media, voters now have more access to their political leaders. Keeping abreast of contemporary trends, modern political elections are very different from the past. Politicians want to communicate with the nation which means they need to communicate with voters of all political spectrums in a delicately balanced manner. Exercising our right to suffrage is a solemn and high involvement affair. But does that mean our political choices are made rationally and with considerable thought? We cannot say to what degree the high involvement process is a result of rational thinking or on emotional value judgment. We need to monitor a politician for several months to evaluate the candidate. In this study we look to see how voters perceive the emotional appeal of a politician or the rational policies they espouse. Are they progressive or conservative voters? How do voters perceive a candidate political appeal, trust in their policies, and how this support is derived and won. We want to know the cognitive path voters take in their political decision making. The whole process has important political implications.

2. Literature review and Hypothesis

2.1. Emotional and Rational value

According to psychology and social science, the process of human choice is decided emotionally and/or rationally. Emotional responses fulfill a person's hedonic values whilst a person's rationality is striving for pragmatic or utilitarian value [1][2][3][4]. Hirshman and Holbrook [1] also suggest that people's emotional value perception is formed from their symbolic and aesthetic values. Symbolism is the representation of things by means of symbols or of attributing symbolic meanings to an object, person or group. Symbolism can evoke powerful imagery and emotional responses. Aesthetics is the standard of outer beauty and also the standard for emotional judgment. Emotion is defined as the immediate state of mind from their thoughts or ideas and some kind of value judgment [5]. This kind of emotional value perception prevails over rationality when faced with making choices and has a direct effect on the satisfaction level [6][7][8]. Also Carbarino and Edell[7] claimed that one of the keys to attaining superior customer loyalty is through emotion because emotional value perception eventually prevails over rationality. For this reason, we determined emotional components such as the candidates' appearance, image and symbolism will have a bigger influence on voter's opinion of candidates than rational value perception elements such as the economic benefit that will be derived from supporting the candidate. We recognized that the strong conflicts between conservatives and liberals, interregional conflicts and intergenerational conflicts that are prevalent in Korea have a greater influence on emotional components than on rational components, and these emotional perceptions are influencing rational judgments. Therefore, being convinced that emotional perceptions will indeed influence voters' rational judgment, we established the following hypothesis

H1. Voters' emotional value perception has a positive effect on rational value perception towards politician or candidate in online environment.

2.2. Emotional, rational value perception & trust in policies

This study looks at how voter's perception is translated into continuing political support. Trust in policies plays an important role as a moderating variable in this paper. Emotional and rational value perceptions of a candidate are the two factors which will impact on trust in policies and as a consequence leads to continuing political support. The concept of trust from a political perspective is expanded below. The concept of trust is defined as faith in how people will respond in an expected way. Mayer et al[9] defines trust as "faith that a person can be relied upon to deliver on any promises they have made". Moorman, Deshpande and Zaltman [10] defines trust as being able to rely on a trustable party or trustable person. The basic elements of trust are compliance and confidence [11]. Roloff [12] concept of social exchange theory states that when individuals participate in social transactions, it is determined by trust. Trust in policies is defined as faith that the candidate's policy will be executed according to the nominal expectations of the electorate [13][14]. The factors affecting trust in policies can be differentiated by emotional and rational factors. Trust in policies is formed as a result of a voter's emotional response towards a candidate. These emotional opinions can be shaped by a variety of factors such as a candidate's appearance, socio-economic background, gender, regional background and reputation [15][16]. Rationality, efficiency and fairness are the rational factors which can also contribute to trust in policies. In this paper, we utilize the operational definition of rational value perception as the economic benefit and realistic possibility of realization of a candidate's policies etc. Interpersonal trust is especially affected by emotional perception. Cognitive based trust is formed by accumulating information on the trustee which subsequently shapes emotional-based trust – defined as the emotional and empathetic bonds between two people [16][17]. Thus we put forward the hypothesis that a voter's emotional and rational value perception has an effect on the trust in policies of candidates.

H2. Voters' emotional value perception has a positive effect on policy trust towards politician or candidate in online environment.

H3. Voters' rational value perception has a positive effect on policy trust towards politician or candidate in online environment.

2.3. Policy trust, expectation for communication & continuing support

This study hypothesized that trust in policies has an influence on the expectation for communication and continuing political support. Bradach and Eccles[18] argued that trust, as a control mechanism is vitally important as a means for defining relationships and proclaimed "trust is a type of expectation that alleviates the fear that one's exchange partner will act opportunistically". This type of trust is limited to only 'trusting and relying on a specific counterpart, however it will influence other policy trust factors as well. Gulati [19], reported that trust leads to ongoing formation of relationships. Also, communication resulting from trust in policies indicates informal or formal sharing of meaningful and timely information exchange between two parties [20], and foster trust by assisting in resolving disputes, aligning perceptions, and expectations [21]. Anderson and Narus [20] points out that past communication is an antecedent of trust however accumulation of trust leads to better communication. In other words, past frequent and high-quality communication results in greater trust and enhances the quality of communication in the future [21][22]. Expectation for communications is the assumption that there will be high-quality bidirectional dialogue. Roloff[12] defined communication as a process of conveying ideas to receivers and exchanging information, opinions, ideas, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. This means that communication is more than simply a sender delivering a message but rather, it requires confirmation of content as well as understanding from a receiver. Ussem [23] also defined communications as the process of exchanging information or messages through signs with a view to bilaterally

agree on the meaning and to influence each organism's behavior. In other words, communication is not a one-way delivery; rather it is a process of forming agreed meaning through purposeful bidirectional communication. It means that members of an organization with a specific purpose take measures to dynamically accomplish the required information exchange. Continuing support for a candidate regardless of the election result means continuing to have trust in the candidate's policies. Whether trust in policies influences expectations for communications and continuing support directly or indirectly would depend on the research model [23][24]. What's important is that various researches confirm that is a positive influence[25]. Therefore we hypothesized that the trust in policies influences expectation regarding communication and continuing support.

H4. Voters' political trust has a positive effect on expectation for communication towards politician or candidate in online environment.

H5. Voters' expectation for communication has a positive effect on continuing support towards politician or candidate in online environment.

H6. Voters' political trust has a positive effect on continuing support towards politician or candidate in online environment.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

Demographical characteristics of the participants are as follows. A total of 307 participants responded. 36 responses with insincere answers were excluded and 271 responses were used in our analysis. As summarized on table 2, 67.5% of the respondents were male and 32.5% was female. Majority of the participants were aged between 20 to 40. People in their 20's were 42.8%, 30's were 30.7%, and above 40 were 26.5%. Regionally, 55.7% of the participants were from Seoul or Gyeonggi-do. As for occupations, 10.3% of the participants were professionals, 38.4% had office jobs, 10.3% had skills and sales and 28.8% were students. In terms of political preferences 53.5% of the participants were determined as conservatives and 46.5% as liberals; making the researcher feel that the sample was suitable for comparing the two political groups. For this study, we conducted an internet survey in May of 2005 targeting people of various ages using social media. In the survey, questions designed to identify whether the respondent was a liberal or a conservative were included in order to statistically analyze the differences in each respective political group. We sought to identify the emotional value perception factors (appearance, voice, facial expression, symbolism) that have influence on a participant's opinion of a candidate. We also looked to discover factors affecting Rational Value Perception. Our trust in policies questions sought to gauge the trust level of policy promises and of the candidate themselves. The expectation for communication questions sought to identify reasons behind a candidate continuing to receive political support. The survey questions are listed in table 1.

Table 1. Survey Item and measurement

Variables		Questionnaires	Reference
Emotional Value Perception	EVP1 - EVP4	questionnaire about the emotional value perception of candidates or politicians: appearance, facial expression, voice, symbolic meaning	Hirshman and Holbrook[30]
Rational Value Perception	RVP1 RVP2 RVP3	questionnaire about the rational value perception of candidates or politicians: economic issues of a policy, solution for economic area, feasibility	Venkatraman , MacInnis[2]
Policy Trust	PT1 PT2 PT3	Trust about policy of a politician or candidate: public trust towards the electoral pledge, faith on their behavior and action, politician trust	Lewicki, Bunker [16]

Expectation for Communication	EFC1 EFC2 EFC3	expectation for communication with politicians: communicate well with the nation, social unification, integrate the society	Anderson, Narus [20]
Continuing Support	CS1 CS2 CS3	intention for continuous support for politicians: friendly support, intention to support	Useem[23]

Table 2. Demographic data

Demographic categories	Range	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Under 25	58	21.4
	25-29	58	21.4
	30-34	46	17.0
	35-39	37	13.7
	40-44	34	12.5
	45+	38	14.0
Gender	Male	183	67.5
	Female	88	32.5
Address	Seoul/Capital area (Korea)	151	55.7
	Busan/ Other area (Korea)	120	44.3
Occupation	Professional	28	10.3
	Office worker	104	38.4
	Technician/ Sales person	28	10.3
	Self-employed	14	5.2
	Students	78	28.8
	Others	19	7.0
Political Tendency	Conservative	145	53.5
	Progressive	126	46.5
Friends in Facebook	Under 200	172	63.4
	200+	99	36.6

3.2. Result

Researchers verified the structural equation model of emotional value perception, rational value perception, trust in policies, expectation for communication, and continuing support. In this research, we used the SEM methodology recommended by Anderson and Gerbing [26]. This methodology has 2 steps, first we should confirm the reliability and validity of the research model, second we should confirm the research hypotheses and model fitness of the structural model. First, we validate by using the confirmatory factor analysis in AMOS structural equation modeling. Table 3 lists the standardized factor loadings, the composite reliability, the average variance extracted (AVE) and the Cronbach's Alpha values. All item loadings are larger than 0.7, T-values are also significant for all the items, they show $P < 0.001$. All AVEs and CRs exceed 0.5 and 0.7, respectively. Also, all Cronbach's Alpha are over 0.7, which means they have a high credibility [27][28].

The Chi-square(X^2) fit statistics show 240.699 with 98 of freedom, and Chi-square/df is 2.456 ($p < 0.001$, Suggested value < 4.0). Goodness-of-fit indices provide empirical evidence of the degree of correspondence between the standardization data and the proposed research model. The average measurement score was distributed within the recommendable areas. The root mean square residual (RMR) is 0.091, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.073. As explained above, the RMR and the RMSEA index are a good fit. The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) is 0.903, the normed fit index (NFI) is 0.970, the relative fit index (RFI) is 0.963, the incremental fit index (IFI) is 0.982, the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) is 0.978, the comparative

fit index(CFI) is 0.982, the parsimony normed fit Index (PNFI) is 0.792, and the parsimony-adjusted comparative fit index (PCFI) is 0.802.

Table 3. Result of analysis

Variables of proposed model		Standardized item loading	T-Value	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted	Cronbach's Alpha
Emotional Value Perception	EVP← EVP1	0.901 *	32.253	0.940	0.796	0.977
	EVP ← EVP2	0.965 *	52.070			
	EVP ← EVP3	0.989 *	- a)			
	EVP ← EVP4	0.977 *	60.460			
Rational Value Perception	RVP ← RVP1	0.917 *	-	0.896	0.741	0.943
	RVP ← RVP2	0.903 *	24.472			
	RVP ← RVP3	0.941 *	27.508			
Policy Trust	PT ← PT1	0.974 *	46.667	0.955	0.877	0.981
	PT ← PT2	0.980 *	49.192			
	PT ← PT3	0.968 *	-			
Expectation for Communication	EFC ← EFC1	0.945 *	38.794	0.944	0.849	0.975
	EFC ← EFC2	0.975 *	-			
	EFC ← EFC3	0.972 *	47.597			
Continuing Support	CS ← CS1	0.975 *	49.880	0.934	0.824	0.973
	CS ← CS2	0.976 *	-			
	CS ← CS3	0.933 *	36.343			
Summary of model fit indices : X²= 184.787, df=94, p=0.000, X²/df= 1.966, RMR=0.041, GFI=0.924, NFI=0.977, RFI=0.971, IFI=0.989, TLI=0.985, CFI=0.989, PRATIO=0.783, PNFI=0.765, PCFI=0.774, RMSEA=0.060						
*) P< 0.001, a) fixed to 1						

As shown in Table 4, The RMR, RMSEA, GFI, NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI, CFI, PNFI, and PCFI fit indices surpass and close the suggested value for a good model [26][28].

The result of the structure model assessment is presented in Table 4 and Figure.2. Supporting H1, EVP had a significant positive effect on RVP (Standardized Regression Weights: $SRW=0.820$, $t\text{-value}=18.901$, $p<0.001$). Supporting H2, EVP had a significant positive effect on PT (Standardized Regression Weights: $SRW=0.566$, $t\text{-value}=11.683$, $p<0.001$). Also, H3 is supported by the significant positive impact of RVP on PC ($SRW=0.403$, $t\text{-value}=8.092$, $p<0.001$). Supporting H4, PT had a significant positive effect on EFC ($SRW=0.863$, $t\text{-value}=23.714$, $p<0.001$). Supporting H5, EFC had a significant positive effect on CS ($SRW=0.309$, $t\text{-value}=5.759$, $p<0.001$). Also, H6 is supported by the significant positive impact of PT on CS ($SRW=0.646$, $t\text{-value}=11.844$, $p<0.001$). All of hypotheses (H1-H6) are supported by the data analysis of AMOS. Figure. 2 presents the results.

Table 4. Result of testing hypothesis

Path of proposed model		Standardized item loading	T-Value	Results
RVP ← EVP	H1	0.820 ***	18.901	Support
PT ← EVP	H2	0.566 ***	11.683	Support
PT ← RVP	H3	0.403 ***	8.092	Support
EFC ← PT	H4	0.863 ***	23.714	Support
CS ← EFC	H5	0.309 ***	5.759	Support
CS ← PT	H6	0.646 ***	11.844	Support

Summary of model fit indices : $X^2=240.699$, $df=98$, $p=0.000$, $XC^2/df=2.456$, $RMR=0.091$, $GFI=0.903$, $NFI=0.970$, $RFI=0.963$, $IFI=0.982$, $TLI=0.978$, $CFI=0.982$, $PNFI=0.792$, $PCFI=0.802$, $RMSEA=0.073$

*) $p < 0.1$, **) $p < 0.05$, ***) $p < 0.001$

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper is about the emotional and rational value perception, communication and support for political candidates. Also we clarified the perception of voters depending on their political tendencies. For this study, we extracted the research model of emotional, rational value perception, and continuing support. As well, we analyzed the differences of perception and support between voters' perceptions based on their political preferences. Through this process, we suggest an integrated analysis method on the correlation between emotional and rational relationships, value perception and political tendencies[30].

Based on our online survey, we examined the complex relationship between voter's perception coloured by their innate political biases and continuing political support and verified that there are differences in perception according to a person's political tendencies. Accordingly we conclude that;

Voter's emotional value perception towards a politician will affect their rational value perception and also trust in their policies and their expectations for communications and continuing political support. We verified the fitness of the research model and path analysis of the model.

Based on the research model, we identified differences in the cognitive paths taken by voters according to our moderating variable – which is their political tendency towards being either a conservative or progressive voter. As a result, emotional perception value towards politicians affects rational value perception and also trust in their policies, expectations for communications and continuing support towards politician[31][32]. Thus we verified the cognitive path analysis of our research model and confirm that emotional value perception affects continuing political support which is the dependent variable. We also verified that conservative voters tend to be more affected by emotional value perception and are less rational in their judgment of politicians. Trust in their policies is a more important consideration for conservative voters than expectations for communications in garnering their political support. In contrast, progressive voters place more importance on expectations for communications in formulating their political support but it is not a statistically significant factor. The above findings verify our integrated research model about emotional value perception affecting continuing political support and differences that emerge in our path analysis of conservative and progressive voters. This study has important theoretical and pragmatic value. However the value of this study is slightly diminished by the sampling of only three regions in Korea - Seoul, Busan, and kyung-gi province. We hope other researchers will continue with further studies.

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